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ABSTRACT

This study used high-profile research on a school district to construct a case study of how a political context that presents urban schools as unsalvageable has also resulted in a research stripped of critique. The study compared published reports about district ("District 2") accomplishments to data on school achievement and school demographics on state and city reports and analyzed the data in light of the author's insider knowledge as a parent-activist. The examination reveals important aspects of District 2's record that have not been explored, the most glaring of which is the intense social and racial stratification among the schools and the lack of clear evidence that its implementation of an instructional delivery system built on national standards has been successful. Comparison of schoolwide achievement between District 2 and District 25 (Queens, New York) indicates that the description by some researchers of District 2's model of systemic reform as exemplary is, at the least, questionable, and may have obscured hard questions about District 2's ability to diminish achievement differentials that correlate closely with segregation, race, and poverty. (Contains 6 tables and 25 references.) (Author/SLD)

CONSTRUCTION OF DISTRICT 2's EXEMPLARY STATUS:

WHEN RESEARCH AND PUBLIC RELATIONS ELIDE

PAPER PRESENTED TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

APRIL, 2002

NEW ORLEANS

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ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

What are the moral and political responsibilities of university-based researchers who assist local school authorities in the implementation of policies ? To what extent are scholars whose stature and research are invoked to support educational practices responsible for the (mis)application of their work? This study uses high-profile research on District 2 as a case study of how a political context that presents urban schools as unsalvageable has also resulted in research stripped of critique. The paper compares published reports about District 2's accomplishments to data on student achievement and school demographics on state and city reports and analyzes the data in light of the author's insider knowledge as a parent-activist. The examination brings to light important aspects of District 2's record that have not been explored, the most glaring of which is the intense social and racial stratification among the schools and the lack of clear evidence that its implementation of an instructional delivery system built on national standards has been successful. Comparison of school-wide achievement between District 2 and District 25, Queens indicates that researchers' description of District 2's model of systemic reform as exemplary is, at the very least, questionable and may have obscured hard questions about District 2's ability to diminish achievement differentials that correlate closely with segregation, race, and poverty.

The direct assistance that university-based researchers provide to school systems involved in reform is generally accepted as positive, strengthening the relationship between theory and practice and in the process improving both. However, key aspects of collaborations between school districts and universities deserve closer attention, as is suggested by Zeichner's discussion (1995) of the extent to which power differentials between school faculty and university researchers are addressed in formulating research designs and questions. Reforms of the past decade, formerly acknowledged only by researchers as controlled by professional, corporate, and political elites (Cohen, 1995; Mickelson, 1999; Shipps, 1997) are now explicitly welcomed as such by politicians rejecting popular control of schooling (McAdams 2000). Urban school systems in particular are viewed as close to unsalvageable as democratically-controlled, publicly funded systems and therefore in need of control by elites (McAdams 2000). In this context of urgency, researchers who collaborate with authorities in urban schools may experience pressures to show that success is possible, that reforms "work." Yet pressure to find solutions to the seemingly intractable problems of urban schools conflicts with the major responsibilities of intellectuals, pursuing "freedom with respect to those in power, the critique of received ideas, the demolition of simplistic either-ors, respect for the complexity of problems" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 92).

In this paper I use research on school improvement in District 2 in Manhattan as a case study, to examine the problem of conflict between the critical functions of research and intellectuals and the pressing need to generate models of urban

school reform that are successful. District 2's strategy of using professional development to implement national standards has been upheld as an example of how an urban school district can make standards-based reform succeed, an illustration of public education's continued viability in the nation's cities (Elmore, 1999-2000; Elmore & Burney, 1997a; Elmore & Burney, 1997b; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Elmore & Burney, February1999). Prominent research has also heralded the District's focus on a centralized system of professional development linked to standards as being the key to improving achievement in urban schools (Fink & Resnick, 1999; Resnick & Harwell, 2000; Stein, D'Amico & Johnstone, April 1999). As Lauren Resnick, a researcher closely identified with published reports touting District 2's success comments:

> Over an eleven-year period, Community School District Two in New York City has amassed a strong record of successful school improvement in a very diverse urban school setting. Not only have test scores risen, but there is also a remarkable professional spirit among the teachers, principals, and central staff members of the district, which has 22,000 students in 45 schools (Fink & Resnick, 1999, p. 3).

This study draws on several types of sources in addition to published research on District 2, including publicly available data on school achievement and demographics on the New York State Department of Education and New York City

Board of Education websites, correspondence with District 2 teachers, unpublished reports on the District's math curriculum, and field notes following conversations with principals, teacher union officials and teachers in District 2 schools. [1] Teachers and school administrators in District 2 who spoke and corresponded with me were informed that the information would be used in a published study and consented to interviews on the condition that they remain anonymous. Any information provided by District 2 employees who desired to remain anonymous was confirmed by at least two other people, generally in two other schools. My rationale for identifying the district and researchers is that their work is a matter of public record. Indeed, high-profile research on District 2 in Manhattan has given its reforms a reputation of success that has encouraged state officials from locales as distant culturally and geographically from New York City as rural Vermont to press for District 2's practices as a template for professional development (personal communication with Vermont college administrator, April 2001).

From 1998 until 2000, I was active as a parent in the New York City public school that my daughter attended, the John Melser Charrette School, or as it is more commonly called, PS 3. From this vantage point I gleaned information and

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[1] This paper is the third in a series examining school reform in New York City and District 2 from my perspective as a parent activist. In "Systemic Reform's 'Learning by All': *Who* evaluates Learning by Policy Analysts?" (forthcoming in May, Educational Policy) I explore contradictions between research about creation of school-based management teams and the lived-reality of parents and teachers in PS 3. Another study, (forthcoming, The Urban Review) investigates why gender equity has been marginalized in urban school reform and in the process scrutinizes how efforts to address gender inequality are undercut by District 2's hierarchical notions of reform and its uncritical embrace of the ideology of professionalism.

acquired a perspective that would not readily be available to researchers on District 2 unless it had been consciously sought, which it was not. Resnick's description (Fink & Resnick, 1999) of how the research design was formulated explains how critical perspectives on District 2 policies were omitted:

> We were trying to figure out which people in the district should be interviewed and observed in order to understand how the district functioned. Someone started to diagram the way in which teachers were expected to learn from principals and professional developers and each other within their school, while at the same time principals were expected to learn from the Superintendent and Deputy and from each other how to be better at their instructional leadership job. Someone else said, "It's like those nesting dolls people like to bring back from their travels"—and the name was born. The image seems to work because the dolls are each independent, free-standing "people," yet they share a common form—and you can't decide which is the most "important" doll, the tiny one in the middle that establishes the shape for them all or the big one on the outside that encloses them all (p. 6).

The diagram outlined by those involved in the study design supports an analogy (of nesting dolls) that is simultaneously hierarchical and exclusively self-referential. The analogy is also a remarkable for being static and decontextualized, with relationships unaffected by "outside" influences such as parent feedback,

which seems to be an accurate description of decision making in the district. [2] Though Resnick comments in the quote above that it is not clear which doll is the most "important," her statement seems to contradict power and status relations of the "nested doll" analogy. She observes that the doll in the middle is "tiny" and "the big one on the outside...encloses them all." The outer doll then shapes the configuration, and size and power diminish as one moves to the inside of the "nest."

PS 3 is an arts-based, alternative school started by parents (Zuckerman, 2001), with a unique history that has made it resistant to many District 2 initiatives. PS 3 is probably one of the schools district officials and researchers categorize as "off the screen," or using the analogy of the nesting dolls, outside of the nest. In its demographics and test scores PS 3 exemplifies "off the screen" schools. As a report observes, "for a variety of reasons, off-the-screen schools are not working within the District #2 framework. While student achievement in some cases is fairly strong, the district leadership has concerns about the quality of instruction and or leadership in these schools" (D'Amico, van den Heuvel, & Harwell, 2000, p. 6). Curiously, District 2 leaders' concerns about achievement in instruction and leadership in these "off-the-screen" schools are not articulated in research describing the district's accomplishments and problems. One could argue that if achievement as measured by tests is fairly strong in these "off-the-screen"

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[2] The analogy of the "nesting doll" is also significant for the way in which it depicts a construction of teacher professionalism that is "raced," "classed," and "gendered" but is unrecognized as being so. I explore this notion in the forthcoming article in The Urban Review.

schools that a close examination of their instructional and leadership practices and of their school cultures might provide important data about what makes the district's instructional delivery system distinctive and distinctively effective. More important, comparisons of data on individual achievement disaggregated by race and ethnicity, rather than school-wide data, which is the only sort provided by the district and school system, could provide persuasive evidence that the district's reform strategies were more successful than practices in "off-the-screen" schools. On the other hand, the data might suggest otherwise.[3]

When PS 3 teachers came under strong pressure from the district to alter their practices without, it seemed to some activist parents, consultation with parents, I was enlisted to become active in school politics, ran for the School Leadership Team, and was elected. From correspondence with parents and teachers union representatives (called "chapter chairs" in New York City schools) at several other District 2 schools, and from unpublished reports of a group organized to oppose the unilateral implementation of the District's math curriculum, I learned that teachers in several schools feared they would be fired if they did not conform to inflexible mandates about how and what to teach, even when the

[3] The PS 3 School Leadership Team, which I served on in 2000-2001 as a parent representative, tried to secure disaggregated data from the district for an entire year, to use in developing the Comprehensive Educational Plan which is supposed to guide all decisions. Our efforts failed. In this light it is striking that these data were secured by researchers and used in analyses (D'Amico, Harwell, Stein & van den Heuvel, April 2001) but not made available to school leadership teams, which are legally responsible for decisions about budget and instruction.

mandates conflicted with parent desires or their professional judgment.[4] A few chapter chairs complained that the leadership of their national union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) had without District 2 teachers' knowledge or agreement promoted District 2's administration in the union's national magazine (American Educator, 1999-2000). As union representatives who hear teachers' problems and begin the grievance process, they viewed the leadership of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) as unwilling to pursue teachers' complaints, formally or informally, because of close relationships between present and former District 2 leaders and UFT and AFT officials. For example, before becoming District 2 Superintendent, Anthony Alvarado served briefly as a special assistant to Albert Shanker.

Clear evidence of teacher dissatisfaction with the UFT's stance towards the District 2 surfaced in the Spring 2000 election for the UFT's district representative. Each community school district in New York has a union representative, a "district rep" who negotiates issues of local concern with the district administration. The "district rep" is elected by chapter chairs, but elections are almost always pro forma because of the UFT leadership's tight control of the union apparatus (Weiner, 1998). However, in a palace revolt, District 2 chapter chairs elected a teacher running against the "heir apparent" of the UFT leadership (personal communication, chapter chair in District 2, May 2000). Teachers' suspicions about the UFT's close

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[4] Information about the opponents of the math curriculum, led by New York University math faculty and District 2 parents, is available from Elizabeth Carson, ecarson@nyc.rr.com.

relationship with District 2 leaders were explicitly confirmed when the UFT president visited PS 3 after parents garnered widespread media attention for protests about the school's principal being fired only six weeks into the job (Lee, 22 Oct. 2000; Lee, 29 Oct. 2000). In the meeting with teachers and in a conversation with me that followed, the UFT president explained that though District 2's administration had trouble hearing what teachers had to say, nevertheless District 2 leaders had to be supported because their model of reform was not only superior to others, it was the only one that could convince the public that city schools could be salvaged.

The ferment among District 2 teachers about the union's unwillingness to pursue grievances arising from the reform efforts is not evident in research on District 2.[5] A similar disregard or lack of knowledge of the context is seen in the construction of a key questionnaire, dated May 2000, for the HPLC study on professional development. The questionnaire which provided data for two published reports required teachers to provide their New York City Board of Education ID

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[5] I informed Richard Elmore and Lauren Resnick about the concerns raised to me by District 2 teachers about the use of file numbers and Alvarado's presence as a PI. Only Lauren Resnick responded (letter, 17 July 2000), and Stein and Resnick met with me in April 2001. According to notes I took after our meeting, the ethical objections I raised to the conduct of research, namely that it deepened a climate of fear and made researchers appear to be in collusion with the district administration, were dismissed. Resnick acknowledged the possibility of "bad design." Stein noted that their findings actually contradicted claims being made about District 2's success. However both Stein and Resnick rejected my proposal that they assume responsibility for clarifying that HPLC's latest research told a different story about District 2 from the one that had been widely publicized in earlier work. Resnick explained that their role had ended with the study's completion. Their stance contrasts with the posture of other prominent researchers, like Howard Gardner, who take care to monitor application of their research and correct what they see as faulty interpretations.

numbers (often used in lieu of names to locate personnel in official records) and their schools. The consent form included in the published appendix (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000) omits this item. Thus the form in the appendix is not a duplicate of the form distributed to teachers. A cover letter from Deputy Superintendent Bea Johnstone (2000), omitted from the appendix (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000), an appendix cited in the subsequent study (D'Amico, Harwell, Stein, van den Heuvell, April 2001) refers to this request for teachers' file numbers, noting that "The survey asks for your name and your teacher folder number, so that the information gained from it can be linked to other data collected in the course of the HPLC study" but that "individual responses will *not* [emphasis in the original] be seen by other members of the District #2 community." Also absent from the appendix, perhaps explaining the cover letter from Johnstone, is the "Consent to act as a participant in a research study" University of Pittsburgh IRB# 980136, which lists Anthony Alvarado, District 2's former superintendent, as a principal investigator, and his institutional affiliation as - District 2. The address given for Alvarado as a principal investigator is District 2, although he was not Superintendent when the questionnaire was distributed. Elaine Fink, a deputy superintendent of District 2 for eight years, replaced him (New York City Board of Education, 2000). As a district official whose responsibilities took her to several elementary and middle schools noted (interview, June 2000) Fink and Alvarado's close social and professional connections were common knowledge among teachers in the district, due to its remarkably active grapevine . Johnstone's letter, which accompanied the cover letter by Lauren Resnick reproduced in the appendix, seems

to address teacher apprehensions about relations between researchers and administrators and the confidentiality and use of the research.[6] District 2 chapter chairs communicated informally about what they should tell teachers who feared that completed questionnaires would not be confidential (personal communication with two chapter leaders). Many chapter chairs advised teachers privately if they worried that they would be wise not to fill out the questionnaire.

An even more important aspect of District 2's operations missing in high-profile research is exploration of implications of the district's access to human and material resources that urban districts typically lack. The "variability" and variation among schools and neighborhoods, the term used to describe District 2's demographics (Elmore & Burney, 1999a; Fink & Resnick, 1999) fails to convey the numerous advantages afforded by District 2's highly unusual concentration of neighborhoods of economically comfortable families who send their children to public school. One study acknowledges that District #2 is "a fairly wealthy urban district... the fourth wealthiest community school district in New York City...and in the upper quartile for urban districts nationally" (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000, p. 9). Yet the implications of this highly unusual characteristic are not explored. The reports describe the geography and mention that District 2

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[6] Another item omitted from the Appendix and not mentioned in the reports was a notice distributed to teachers, signed "The HPLC Research Team" with the HPLC address, phone, fax, and website. It announced a reward of $500 to schools in which 90% of the teachers returned questionnaires. The notice also informs teachers that the extra consent form to serve as their personal copy, included in the original packet with Johnstone's cover letter, "is the wrong version" and should be discarded.

encompasses a broad swath of Manhattan's wealthiest real estate and most of its prosperous neighborhoods. However, what the reports do not explore is the extent to which the district's concentration of wealthy neighborhoods spares many of its schools from demands made on most other city schools, for instance providing extra resources for security, or "Keeping students in, gangs out, scores up, alienation down, and the copy machine in working order: Pressures that make urban schools in poverty different" (Metz, 1997). The elementary school that often has the highest test scores in New York City and is used a training ground for District 2 principals is PS 234, in the heart of Tribeca, which before the terrorist attack of Sept. 11 was one of the most prosperous and culturally homogeneous (European American) neighborhoods in all five boroughs. A ZIP-code by ZIP-code analysis of the New York real estate market found that Tribeca "was the highest priced residential neighborhood in Manhattan last year" (Hevesi, 2002). A map of the district displays its peculiar geographical configuration, which like the boundaries of all of the community school districts, resulted from political negotiations in the school decentralization battles in the late 1960s: It crosses the island in a thin band avoiding the Lower East Side (which is in the far poorer District 1), and whisks upward to 96th Street on the Upper East Side, stopping on the outskirts of East Harlem. A report on median sale prices for apartments in Manhattan (Hevesi, 2002) shows how affluent are almost all of District 2's neighborhoods. Chelsea registered the third highest average price ($1,024,850) for apartments in Manhattan, due to loft conversions (Hevesi, 2002) that have turned warehouses into art galleries. District 2 now contains only one swath of real estate

inhabited primarily by families living in poverty, Chinatown, populated in great part by newly arrived immigrants. The largest minority population in District 2 schools is Asian, and the Asian and white population combined constitute 65% of the students served. In New York City schools that figure is 27% (New York City Board of Education, 2000). Data on the school report cards for each school in District 2 show that schools in Chinatown serve the highest proportions of students in District 2 who are English-language learners, the designation for students who have been in the US for three years or less.[7]

Savvy former students of mine seeking jobs in New York City schools have told me that District 2 is known as the "silk stocking district" among prospective teachers. New York City designates elementary schools with a "need factor" from one to 12, based on the percentage of students categorized as English Language Learners, students identified as eligible for special education, and students eligible for free or reduced lunch. As shown in Table 4, more than a third of District 2 schools have a "need factor" of one, two, or three, signifying that they have a student composition that more closely approximates what teachers would find in the suburban school systems close to the city, where there is also no teacher shortage (Institute for Education & Social Policy, 2001). It is possible that the district's well-publicized investment in professional development makes it more attractive to the graduates from elite, private universities in Manhattan (Bank Street, New York University, Teachers College), institutions from which many of its

[7] I examined the 1999-2000 report cards for all elementary schools in District 2. They and the District report cards are available at http://www.nycenet.edu/daa.

new hires hail (personal communication, District 2 principal). Another possibility, one suggested by research about how teachers' social class influences their work (Metz 1990), is that many teachers attracted to and recently hired by District 2 want to work with administrators, other teachers, and perhaps students, who share their social class origins, aspirations, and world view. As one veteran African-American teacher in a District 2 school explained, graduates of "City" (City College, of City University of New York) need not apply to District 2's middle class schools because it is highly unlikely they will be chosen. And besides, she asked, why would they want to? They want to work in the places they see high need. [8]

DATA ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN DISTRICT 2: MUCH ADO ABOUT....WHAT?

Reports on test scores and family income in each school published in *The New York Times* (Goodnough, 2000) reveal striking information about the extent to which District 2's demographics are *un*representative of other districts in New York City. In the test results published in October 2000, District 2 in Manhattan and District 8 in the Bronx were reported as enrolling approximately the same number of students, District 2 with 2204, District 8 with 2374. Yet District 2 had 12 elementary schools out of 26 with fewer than 50% of its students qualifying for free lunch, whereas District 8 had one out of 20 (Goodnough, 2000). To pursue the issue of District' 2s representativeness, a key factor in evaluating whether it can

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[8] Questionnaires returned to researchers show a preponderance of White, female, middle-class respondents (D'Amico, Harwell, Stein, Van den Heuvel, April 2001). Curiously, researchers have not investigated the extent to which district hiring procedures screen out teachers and principals whose epistemological beliefs differ from those of the district leadership, and the ways those beliefs correlate with social class (Fink & Resnick, 1999).

indeed be a model for school districts elsewhere, I examined demographic data for each county on the New York State Department of Education website (Table 1).

As Table 1 shows, the only district in New York State outside of those in New York City that enrolls about the same number of students as District 2 is Yonkers, which differs in significant ways. Two factors that distinguish District 2 are its relatively (for an urban district) low percentage of students who qualify for free/reduced lunch and its racial and ethnic mix of students. Examining demographics for each of the community school districts in New York City, I found only *one*, District 25 in Queens, that closely resembles District 2 in the number of students served (between 20-24,000), the proportion of students reported as eligible to receive free/reduced lunch (between 50-60%), and the student body's ethnic/racial composition (around 10% Black, 30% Hispanic, 30% White, 35% Asian). Note also how the demographics of District 2 differ from the characteristics of the New York City school system as a whole: Close to three-quarters of children the city school system serves are eligible for free/reduced lunch; more than a third are Black; close to 40% are Hispanic; Asian students (identified as "other" on the school report cards) represent only a little over 10%.

Asian students in District 2, the largest minority proportionally, would be categorized in John Ogbu's typology of "voluntary" and "involuntary" minorities (Ogbu, Sept. 1995; Ogbu, Dec. 1995) as "voluntary" minorities. Ogbu posits that voluntary minorities, who emigrate voluntarily, bring a cultural framework of reference that makes adaptation to the middle class norms of schools and academic achievement less problematic than it is for involuntary minorities. Voluntary

minorities are more likely to experience the instances of racism in school and society they encounter as barriers to overcome. In contrast, because of their history of oppression by the dominant culture, involuntary minorities are more likely read school demands for adaptation as an assault on their personhood. Unlike most other districts in New York City and urban districts in New York State, District 2's single largest minority population consists of voluntary minorities (Table 2). Both Ogbu's typology and the categories used to report demographics in New York schools (Black, White, Hispanic, Other- Asian and Pacific Islander) obscure very important differences among these populations. As Cooper and Denner (1998) note, a limitation in the analytical framework Ogbu employs is its lack of emphasis on variation and change within communities, especially upwardly mobile ethnic minority families and children. Gibson (1997) argues Ogbu's typology fails to account for intragroup variability and is too "dichotomous, too deterministic, and in danger of contributing to stereotypical images..."(p. 322). She faults the theory for not taking into account generational and gender differences, as well as lacking explanatory power to account for the experience of groups such as Mexican Americans, who share elements of both categories. Moreover, she contends, the theory fails to take into account school effects and human agency. While acknowledging the limitations in Ogbu's typology, I suggest that his theory helps illuminate why school and instructional practices that are successful with one group of students may not be equally effective with another.

Another, thornier problem with applying Ogbu's analysis is that New York City Board of Education's demographic data do not parallel Ogbu's categories. For

example, the category "English Language Learners" describes recent immigrants both from Puerto Rico and Peru; "Hispanic" students are those with Spanish surnames; students from British Guayana, who are "voluntary" minorities might be labeled "Black," placing them with African Americans, "involuntary" minorities. Although I group students categorized as "Hispanic" in with those categorized as "Black" in the analysis, I caution that some of these students may share the cultural framework of reference of "voluntary" and not "involuntary minorities."

I divided District 2's 25 elementary schools into two categories: those serving a population more than 50% combined Black and Hispanic students with a "need" factor of 7 or greater, and those with fewer than 50% Black and Hispanic students and a "need" factor less than 7. The "need" factor is computed by New York State by combining three demographic characteristics in a school and district: the proportion of students eligible for free/reduced lunch; the proportion of students who are categorized as English Language Learners (immigrants who have arrived within the past 3 years); and percentage of students categorized as requiring special education services. In District 2 there are 11 schools with a "need" factor over 7. Five of these 11 schools are high-poverty schools in Chinatown. The charts in Table 3 show the breakdown of schools in both districts, according to these criteria. I have eliminated the schools in Chinatown from this comparison to look at achievement of majority Black and Hispanic schools in both districts.

Elmore and Burney (1999b) note that 18 schools in District 2 have populations more than 2/3 African-American, Hispanic, and Asian, while four have

populations that are more than 2/3 White but the implications of this finding are not explored further in their study, in particular the extent to which achievement in District 2 schools correlates with their racial and social stratification. As is evident from Table 3, only one elementary school, PS 11, has a student population that mirrors the district's demographics. What is not evident in statistical analyses is that PS 11 also has a very large "gifted and talented" program in which almost all of its White students are enrolled (personal communication, District 2 administrator). Hence, the one elementary school that is demographically representative of the district's enrollment houses two different schools, one serving White students in its "gifted and talented" students, the other Black and Hispanic students. The school's scores are reported in the aggregate.

What is consistently referred to as "variability" or "variation" in school demographics in District 2 is actually a euphemism for a familiar phenomenon in US schools: racial segregation (Gordon 1999). The high degree of racial and social stratification is especially noteworthy in light of comparison to District 25. With approximately the same demographics as District 2, District 25 has only *one* school that is as racially segregated as *eleven* schools in District 2. Table 4 compares the distribution of schools according to their "need" factor in Districts 2 and District 25, Queens. Most schools in District 25 have a "need" factor within the range of 3-7 (17 of 23 schools fall within this range; 6 schools are outliers). District 2 has only 9 of 24 that fall within this range. Seventeen of its schools fall outside this range. The comparison indicates that District 2's schools are far more stratified than those in District 25, a district with a student enrollment that is equivalent in terms of the

demographic categories used by the state.

Comparing achievement between schools in both districts, I used scores on the New York State fourth grade math test in 2000, reported in the *New York Times* (Goodnough, 2000). I compared scores of only those schools serving a majority of Black and Hispanic students. In the New York State tests, scores of level 1 and 2 indicate that the student is "not meeting standards." The results of this comparison are shown in Table 5. In Table 6 I continue the comparison of school-wide test scores, using data from the school report cards published on the New York City Board of Education website and including the number of students tested. These test scores, unlike the others I have analyzed, are for math scores in grades 3-8. Two of the schools in District are K-8 schools, PS/IS 33 and PS/IS 111. With the exception of PS 11, which has a large "gifted and talented program" of mainly White students, *only one school in District 2 has a significantly higher proportion of students "meeting standards" in math than in the school with similar demographics in District 25*. Indeed, several District 2 schools *do not perform as well* as PS 201 in District 25.

Several questions are posed by this comparison with District 25, one of the most critical being what data disaggregated by race and ethnicity reveal about achievement. Research about District 2 does not address this question, with the exception of the studies based on the questionnaire requiring teachers to self-identify with file numbers (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000). [9] Indeed,

[9] The investigators secured achievement and demographic data for individual students in District #2 through the Division of Assessment and Accountability of

Harwell, D'Amico, Stein, and Gatti (2000) note "A shortcoming shared by previous research done on the effectiveness of District #2's professional development system...was that the units of analysis used in these studies were schools. As a result, variation among students' performance and teachers' experiences within schools was ignored"(p.7). Hence their study attempts to correlate achievement on tests with teachers' professional development by examining test scores of individual students taught by teachers who described their professional development experiences in the questionnaires. The investigators state their primary research question: "Are teachers with strong professional development participation patterns more likely to have closed achievement gaps?"(Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000, p. 19). The answer: "In summary, engagement in professional development, as measured by this questionnaire and reported by the 62 respondents, does not appear to have significant influence on student achievement in either literacy or mathematics" (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000, p. 22).

CONCLUSIONS

According to statements by researchers who have looked for evidence that District 2's policies have indeed boosted achievement, there are no data to support this (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000), no data to support even the modulated claim of the "generally positive picture" of systemic reform in District 2

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the Office of the Deputy Chancellor of Instruction of the New York City Board of Education. Disaggregated data have heretofore been made available only to researchers working with the Division of Assessment and Accountability, as I learned when I attempted to secure it for this study (email message from data analyst at DAA).

(Elmore & Burney, 1999a, p. 3). How then can researchers promote District 2's instructional development practices as unusually successful or its investment in staff development tied to national standards as a model to be emulated?

Research on District 2 exemplifies the problems that arise when researchers fail to maintain the independence and critique that Bourdieu (1998) demands of intellectuals. The effect of the inter-dependence of district leaders and researchers, combined with the exclusion of dissenting perspectives, has been to obscure key questions about District 2 practices that need to be explored before they can or should be replicated. From the formulation of research design, to data collection, to presentation of findings, research on District 2 has exemplified a marked disregard for the value of knowledge that might be contributed by teachers and parents who have reservations about the district's reform strategy. As a result, insights that might have contributed to district officials and researchers' learning have been ignored .

The damage of the research is evident in this statement by the new District 2 Superintendent, in the 1999-2000 district report card:

> District Two's mission is to develop ...an accountable, world class education for every student through a re-designed labor management system that supports high performance learning communities utilizing the New Standards "performance standards" along with city and state assessments. Since 1989, the district moved from tenth in reading to second out of 32 community school districts (68% of students reading at proficiency level); from fifth in math to second (65% of students

performing at proficiency levels); and the number of students testing in the bottom quartile in reading was reduced from 20.7% to 5%. We are leading New York City in implementing Standards. (Shelley Harwayne, 2000)

The presentation of the district by its chief official demonstrates a firm belief that District 2 is a model for the entire city school system, a belief that has been encouraged by researchers who have collaborated with district officials in crafting and publicizing the reforms. But comparison of existing data for District 25, knowledge of the social-contextual factors such as District 2's access to human and material resources other districts in the city lack, and the inattention to disaggregation of individual achievement according to race and ethnicity, indicate that the representation of District 2's practices as exemplary by researchers was unsubstantiated. The "labor-management" strategy that resulted from close relationships and consensus between high level union officials and district administrators caused significant turmoil that was not reported in the research. That consensus may not be replicable elsewhere, indeed, may not continue in District 2 with the election of a new "district rep." The rise in achievement levels since 1989 may be due to changes in the district's demographics and not to a focus on instruction or professional development linked to national standards. Research that has attempted to link achievement to professional development has failed to find evidence of correlation, let alone establish causation.

It may be that District 25 is, in fact, just as promising a model of school

improvement. Its elementary schools are far less segregated and stratified by income than are District 2's. Its test scores are equivalent to those in District 2. Moreover, the statement of its Superintendent in the 1999-2000 shows quite a different ideological stance towards students, parents and community:

> The District 25 Areas of Emphasis state that we teach "children, not merely subjects." To support this goal, the District and the Community School Board work closely to provide an integrated, holistic, comprehensive educational program which motivates and engages all students, and provides the optimum opportunity for every child to achieve state and city academic standards... Staff are supported by professional development activities designed to help them hone their instructional skills. Parents and community members are actively involved in all schools and are recognized as valuable resources.

It may be that District 2 has pioneered practices that should be replicated, as the researchers who have promoted it have concluded. However, the opposite conclusion is equally possible. Thus high-profile research on this district exemplifies the dangers posed to schools and research itself when research elides into public relations.

TABLE 1

Comparison of Student Demographics in urban school districts in NYS, Fall 1997*

District	25, Queens	2, Manhattan	Yonkers
Total	24,127	22,212	23,968
White	28.2%	31.2%	23.3%
Black	9.1%	13.8%	30.4%
Hispanic	24.4%	21.1%	41.5%
Other	38.4%	33.8%	4.8%
Free/Reduced lunch	48.5%	51.3%	74.7%
Limited English	19.1%	16.9%	16.4%

*Data from the NY State Education Department school district profiles, downloaded on Jan. 31,2002: http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/ch655_99/D662300.html

This 1997 data is the most recent on the NYS website, so I have used it as the basis of comparison for demographics between the districts in and out of NYC.

TABLE 2

Comparison of demographics of District 2 and District 25

	NYC	District 25, Queens	District 2, Manhattan
Total enrollment	NA on report card	24,499	21,559
White	15.3%	26.3%	31.9%
Black	34.2%	8.4%	13.8%
Hispanic	38.9%	25.3%	20.1%
Other -Asian, Pacific Islanders, Alaskan Natives, Native Americans	11.5%	40.1%	34.2%
Free/Reduced lunch	74.1	50.4%	59.9
Recent immigrants	7.3%	12.3%	9.2%
Limited English	NA on report card	4557 students	2940 students

TABLE 3

Elementary schools serving a population more than 50% combined Black and Hispanic students with a "need" factor of 7 or greater (data from NYCBOE website, ***http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/Mrr/districts***)

In District 25:

School	"Need"	% Hispanic	% Black
PS 201	10	29	40

In District 2:

School	"Need"	% Hispanic	% Black
PS 11	7	31	26
PS 33	10	52	27
PS 51	10	61	18
PS 111	9	66	16
PS 126	7	43	30
PS 151	10	43	30
PS 198	8	52	26

In District 2, 5 of the 11 schools with a "need" factor 7 and above are in Chinatown and have a population that is more than 70% Asian. For instance PS 42, with a "need" factor of 10 (94.2% of its students receive free/reduced lunch and 18.9% are ELL) enrolls 88% Asian students.

TABLE 4

Comparison of elementary schools according to "Student Need" Category, 2000

"Student Need" is a ranking of elementary schools into one of 12 categories based on the percent of students eligible for free lunch, percent of tested students who are in full-time and part-time special education programs, and the percent of tested students who are English Language Learners (ELL). The higher the numbers of students in these categories, the higher the school's "need" factor.

To understand the significance of "need," compare two schools in District 25 with "need" factors of "3" and "10":

"Need" factor of "3" - 40% students with free/reduced lunch, 4% special ed. and 8% ELL.

"Need" factor of "10": 73% students receiving free/reduced lunch, 36% special ed., and 5% ELL.

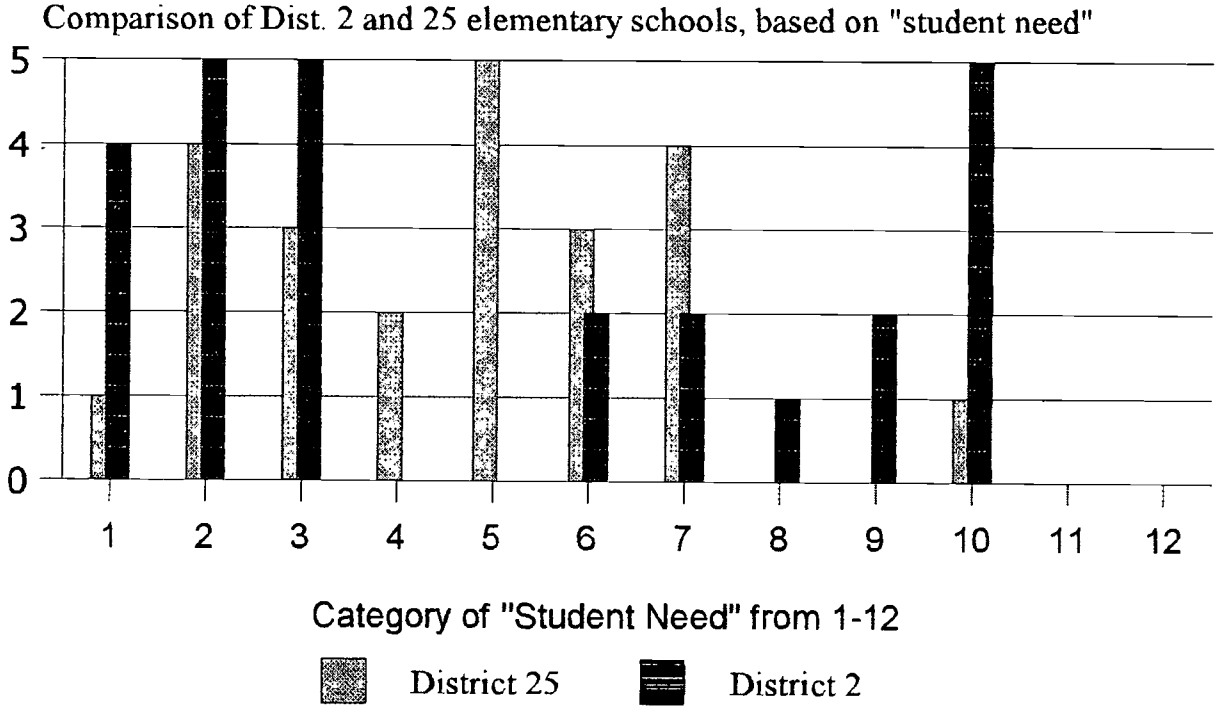

TABLE 5

Scores on the NYS fourth grade math test only in 2000, reported in the *NY Times*, 15 Oct. 2000, (City section, pp. 14-16)

Elementary schools serving a population more than 50% combined Black and Hispanic students with a "need" factor of 7 or greater:

In District 25:

School	**perf. level 1**	**perf. level 2**	**perf. levels 3 & 4**	"Need" factor	% Hispanic	% Black
PS 201	**17%**	**41%**	**43%**	10	29	40

In District 2:

School	**perf. level 1**	**perf. level 2**	**perf. levels 3 & 4**	"Need" factor	% Hispanic	% Black
PS 11	**16%**	**16%**	**68%**	7	31	26
PS 33	**26%**	**41%**	**33%**	10	52	27
PS 51	**19%**	**59%**	**27%**	10	61	18
PS 111	**26%**	**47%**	**27%**	9	66	16
PS 126	**9%**	**45%**	**45%**	7	39	20
PS 151	**15%**	**58%**	**28%**	10	43	30
PS 198	**4%**	**20%**	**76%**	8	52	26

TABLE 6

Add to table 5 a new column in bold: Students taking citywide tests in grades 3,5,6,7 and state tests in grades 4 and 8, in math, including students taking the test in translation who are "meeting the standard," that is reaching performance levels 3 and 4.

District 25

School	**Meeting standard**	"Need" factor	% Hispanic	% Black
PS 201	**31.5% (235 tested)**	10	29	40

District 2

School	**Meeting standard**	"Need" factor	% Hispanic	% Black
PS 11 (34% white; 8% Other)	**50.6% (233 tested)**	7	31	26
PS/IS 33 (White 4%; Asian 37%)	**17.3% (191 tested)**	10	52	27
PS 51	**22.5% (145 tested)**	10	61	18
PS/IS 111	**22.5% (516 tested)**	9	66	16
PS 126	**32.6% (285 tested)**	7	43	30
PS 151	**25% (115 tested)**	10	43	30
PS 198	**53.4% (131 tested)**	8	52	26

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